

Traditional Home service

Sunday 26th March

OPENING PRAYER

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

*My God, for love of you
I desire to hate and forsake all sins
by which I have ever displeased you;
and I resolve by the help of your grace
to commit them no more;
and to avoid all opportunities of sin.
Help me to do this,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*Abide with me*)

READINGS - Ezekiel 37.1-14
Romans 8.6-11
John 11.1-45

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*Love divine*)

CONCLUSION

The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself, the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service, the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Hymns to use

1 Abide with me, fast falls the eventide
The darkness deepens Lord, with me
abide
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me

2 Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass
away
Change and decay in all around I see
O Thou who changest not, abide with me

3 I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless
Ills have no weight, and tears no
bitterness
Where is death's sting?
Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me

4 Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing
eyes
Shine through the gloom and point me to
the skies
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's
vain shadows flee
In life, in death, o Lord, abide with me
Abide with me, abide with me

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation;
enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4 Finish, then, thy new creation;
true and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

Sermon - Adrian Morton
Romans 8:6-11 & John 11:1-45
Our greatest Hope...

I want to walk us through this John reading this morning.

Picking up on one or two bits.
But ending of course with the central message of the Resurrection.

The passage is known as the doorway to the Passion stories of Easter.

The scene is located near to and in a place called Bethany.

Interestingly, today Bethany is a town called Al-Eizariya (Al Ez-zar-eya), located in the West Bank, Palestine.

This Arabic word means 'the place of Lazarus'.

The passage is really detailed.
And it has one or two odd or surprising bits to it.

Now the wedding at Cana was the scene of Jesus' first miracle in John's Gospel.

And this miracle of raising Lazarus is his last miracle before his death.

Miracles or kingdom signs can cause faith to be born, or faith to be renewed.

At Cana, after Jesus turned water into wine, it says his disciples put their faith in him.

In this account, the raising of Lazarus was going to both renew the disciples faith.

Jesus said to them, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe."

So the sign would renew their faith.
Also, at the end of our reading it says that "many of the Jews put their faith in him."

This sign both caused faith to be renewed and faith to be born.
That is what signs can do.

Our reading concerns a particular family.
And it's clear that Jesus loved this family.

We have come across Mary and Martha before.

In Luke 10 we hear the very well known account of how Martha was busy and distracted whereas Mary, her sister, chose to listen at Jesus' feet.

Now Jesus and His disciples hear that their brother Lazarus is sick.

I think at some point the Father whispered in Jesus' ear that this was to be an opportunity to display Glory for Him and Jesus.

Because Jesus knows that the end result won't be death.

He then waits around for 2 days.
This has puzzled many commentators.

Why did he wait, and not go immediately to heal Lazarus.

Why didn't he go to be with those He loved.
To comfort them, support them.
That would have been the obvious pastoral thing to do.

Yet he stayed where he was for 2 days.
At some point Lazarus dies and we learn by the time Jesus eventually gets to the tomb Lazarus has been dead for 4 days.

There was a Jewish belief that when someone died, their soul hovered around the body for 3 days hoping to return.
But when decomposition set in, the soul would leave.
There was no further any hope to return to the body.

So maybe Jesus was waiting so everyone would really know Lazarus had died.

There wouldn't be any doubts about it.

Maybe, for Jesus, rather than a healing miracle, He knew a raising to life miracle would lead to more faith being born and renewed.

Maybe, it was just the opportunity to link himself with Resurrection.

We don't really know why and we are simply told "he stayed where he was two more days."

When he arrived at Bethany, we hear how he first meets Martha and eventually Mary.

I love both their reactions to Jesus.

As we have said, Jesus loved this family. And this family loved Jesus.

They were His friends. They knew Him. They knew His goodness, His mercy, His forgiveness.

They had experienced those things.

And so in the midst of grief, in the midst of confusion as to why he delayed coming, they still placed their faith in Him.

They still saw Jesus as having the solution, even if they weren't sure what that solution might be.

The way Martha and Mary reacted is such a great example to us.

In the midst of grief, of challenge, of confusion, if we have 'tasted and seen that the Lord is good', as it says in Psalm 34

If we have experienced Him, his goodness, His mercy.

Then keep having faith in Him.

It may be we have to intentionally remember back to those times where we experienced the Lord coming through for us.

Or when we experienced the reality of His presence.

Or that word spoken over us.

Or that prophecy given us to.

Because they knew Him, they kept faith in Him.

<Too many people fall away in times of grief, challenge or confusion...>

Then comes another odd or surprising thing.

Reading from v33:

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

There was obviously quite a few people milling around.

Apparently, even a poor family were expected to hire at least 2 flute players and a professional wailing woman to attend a funeral event.

This family was far from a poor family so its likely there was a noisy commotion happening around Jesus.

The NIV translation is "he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled."

The sense is more that Jesus was "outraged in spirit and troubled."

It suggests an anger, an emotional indignation as to what has happened.

Which may go some way to explain what has caused many people a bit of confusion.

v35 - "Jesus wept."

Why did Jesus weep? He knew he was going to raise Lazarus shortly?

I think the best answer is a combination of a number of reasons:

- i. Jesus wept because of the affects of sin and death, which Lazarus was part of. How sin and death affects society.
- ii. He wept because of the unbelief of the Jews around Him. Because of the darkness which blinds people to the Truth? Similar to how he wept over Jerusalem because of that city's unbelief.
- iii. I also wonder whether He wept, because he was naturally compassionate.

There seems to be a link between compassion and kingdom signs. We see that elsewhere in the Gospels.

There's something about the need to enter into the grief, the burden of the moment in order to see a kingdom sign.

In order to see some kind of breakthrough we are contending for.

Often, I think, and I'm applying this to myself as much as anyone else.

Often I think we just try and wave a Holy Spirit magic wand at a solution hoping for a sign.

But what is required first is that we enter into the pain of a situation.

We enter into the burden of it.

We experience the weight, the gravity of it.

We experience an emotional indignation, anger even, about the ravages of sin.

Or the affect of unbelief.

And until we get into that place, waving a Holy Spirit magic wand won't lead to breakthrough.

<Talk about Sizewell...>

Jesus, once more deeply moved, goes to the tomb and calls Lazarus out.

"The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

It's another odd part.

It's almost a comical scene, if it wasn't so serious.

Children books depict this mummy type figure stumbling out of a cave.

Why couldn't the miracle have removed what he was wrapped in.

Did he want others to be part of what he was doing to really drive home what was happening?

Not sure...

What is clear from the reading though is that Jesus is both affirming that Resurrection happens.

And, that the Resurrection is tied up with himself.

The Resurrection is of course so central to our faith.

Without the Resurrection, the Gospel would be meaningless:

Romans 10:9 says, *"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."*

Without the Resurrection, there would be no forgiveness of sins:

1 Corinthians 15:17 says:

if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins

The Resurrections validates the cross.

It is essential to our faith.

<Talk about wedding couples...>

Without the Resurrection the Gospel is meaningless:

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."

I think it was last Easter Day when I said that Father God isn't simply giving us a choice with the Resurrection.

Its not that we can either believe that Jesus is Lord and God raised Him from the death.

Or we can choose to believe that God is there and he just wants us to be kind and nice to each other.

Sadly, too many people are trusting in their own ability to be kind.

Too many are replacing faith in their own goodness.

Its not that kindness isn't good of course. It just doesn't get you saved.

Jesus, in our passage is explaining to Martha that the Resurrection is tied up with Him.

I think he was more than explaining.

He was trying to illicit a heart response from her to believe further in Him.

Even believing that there is going to be a Resurrection is not enough.

Its having faith in the one who is the Resurrection.

Clinging to Jesus, uniting with Him in faith, is living eternally now.

My hope is that people will look into Jesus.. at some point before they die.
If they get an opportunity...

<Talk about my mum>

Just to end...

The Resurrection is the greatest Hope for humankind.

How can we ensure the Resurrection isn't just a distant, vague hope?

The experience of the Holy Spirit is key..

In our Romans passage it says:

if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Paul is often concerned to tell his listeners that it is the experience of the Holy Spirit that authenticates your life as a believer.

It is the Holy Spirit that gives us our sense of belonging.

So the experience of the Hoy Spirit that guarantees our Resurrection.

We know it will happen because we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Amen!